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THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY AND ALIENATION BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH FROM
JHUMPA LAHIRI'S NOVELS 'THE LOWLAND' AND 'THE NAMESAKE'

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Identity is an intriguing component in social life and it is even dealt in cultural discourse. It is even most mentioned or most discoursed theme in Literature. Identity is a discourse which can be elucidated with variety of interpretations. In the absence of identity or when existent identities become debacle, then persons become alienated from individuals and society. The identity and alienation are interconnected to one another and these are the struggles to be substantiated between everyone's life and death. Life transports identities to individuals and alienation resembles death. If life is a starting point to adopt inherited identities from family and society and to prove them, then death ends all the struggles with the alienation. It means life and death are procedures for human beings. Life opens gates for personal identities and death closes the identities with a kind of alienation. The novels of Jhumpa Lahiri, 'The Namesake' and 'The Lowland' questions identities, elucidates reasons for alienation. They amply divulge the importance of life and death and how death of individuals affects the other and how life resolves the enigma of identity and alienation. This paper mainly focuses on questions of identity and causes of alienation with definitions, explanations and examples.

Key words: Identity, Alienation, Life and Death, ideology, isolation.

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1.1 What is Identity?

The concept of Identity is an intriguing component in social life and it is even dealt in cultural discourse. It is even most mentioned or most discoursed theme in Literature. What is identity in its semantic meaning and what does it disclose in pragmatic interpretations? According to Oxford dictionary the semantic meaning of 'identity' is that 'the fact of being who or what a person or thing is'. In pragmatic sense the meaning of 'identity has many conventional elucidations. The world is satiated with full of people from different race, creed, color, tribe, religion, region, caste, and culture. Though, the people are amalgamated in

survival zone as Aristotle rightly pointed out in his *Politics* that man is a social animal; an individual who cannot partake of society, is either a beast or God' (1885: Pg. 1253a) but they are disconnected with different disjointed qualities. People are detached from others as communities and individuals, each having fixated explanations for their separation from one individual to other, one community to other and one country to other. Of course, man is a social animal, human being with humanistic qualities partake with society but limits himself/herself to certain identity by peeling out reasons to intermingle or to disconnect with others. Individuals incessantly intend and form the implications of the groups to which they belong. According to Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov,

"What cognitive perspectives suggest, in short, is that race, ethnicity, and nation are not things in the world but ways of seeing the world. They are ways of understanding and identifying oneself, making sense of one's problems and predicaments, identifying one's interests, and orienting one's action. They are ways of recognizing, identifying, and classifying other people, of construing sameness and difference, and of "coding" and making sense of their actions." (Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov, 2004: 25)

The identity is not a static position; it varies from one group to another and from individual to individual. When a specified identity is put to question or started to contest with bigotries then another form of identity emerges as an alternative contention. Identity is a floating epitome soaked in the minds in order to perpetuate existence. Identity construction can be observed as an enduring development, but identified as susceptible to the complications. Human beings have developed a practice of giving names to everything around him and at the same time human beings are given names, they are called proper nouns. By giving a name to individuals, identification is organized and it is recognizable and distinguishable from one another. It is acceptable to certain extent, preserving names to individuals in order to avoid confusion but when the interrogative pronouns like 'who are you', 'what is your ethnicity' and 'how are you related' sneak in to conversations as enquiries then arises the problem or the concept of 'inferior' and 'superior'. The demarcations happen among people when considerations take place in relation to ascendancy such as 'we are superior nation, race, caste, color and superior sex.

"Identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space or an unresolved question in that space, between a numbers of intersecting discourses[Until recently, we have incorrectly thought that identity is] a kind of fixed point of thought and being, a ground of action, the logic of something like a 'true self.' [But] Identity is a process, identity is split. Identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point. Identity is also the relationship of the Other to oneself." (Hall, 1989: Pg. 6)

The perception of identity seems like a blade having two sides sharpness but with different motives. In one sense identity attends as a developed supernumerary for 'dignity', 'pride', 'status', 'honor', and 'self-respect'. And another meaning functions as 'denial of one's identity'. In one grouping, all most all identities are observable. Man is a social animal in Aristotle sense, but he/she is never satisfied with positioning himself/herself at peripheral zone. Of course, these zones are notional and relational, institutionalized by superior groups or individuals. Human beings always push themselves forward to stand at center. George Orwell's concept from *Animal Farm* comes into argument or contestation that "all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." (51). It is of no offense when one perceives to mould self-assurance or self-respect in his/her terms but it becomes problematic one when one denies other's identity or put other's identity at question.

1.2 Identity envisioned in Jhumpa Lahiri's Novels

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* is a story about an Indian Bengali family, named 'the Ganguli' from Calcutta accommodating themselves in America for thirty years. The novel revolves around the cultural conflict experienced by their family and their American born children in different ways. It also depicts the spatial, cultural and emotional dislocation underwent by them at every point of time in order to settle down in the new land.

The Namesake comprehends themes of struggle in relationships between couples, families, and friends. Lahiri explores concepts of identity and alienation faced by Ganguli family both culturally and individually. Though, the characters in the novel do not encounter serious problems in quest for identity but often come across individual identity crisis more followed by social and cultural identity at times as well. Especially, Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli face problems of language and dilemma to socialize with American approach. They pull back themselves with their inability to reconcile their Indian identity with American Identity. The novelist often connects her characters' cultural alienation with personal alienation, signifying that cultural and social alienation reasons to individual. The prominence of identity is prearranged notion which is presented through identification of 'name' at the first chapter of the novel when Ashima calls out her husband from the bathroom. She glues to Indian traditional fixation of not calling husband with name but through other respectable words and here she follows the same practice of Bengali culture even after landing in foreign place. They consider that husband's name is used in personal or closed group to disclose love and affection towards their intimate soul. In second chapter also the significance of the Bengali practice of pet names, or 'daknam' and 'bhalanam' is explicated in relation to giving a name to their newly born child. The pet name is used in privacy only in close family relations while the actual name is used in formal positions at work and other important places. They wait for receiving a pet name from her grandmother from Calcutta but as it gets late, Ashoke decides a name of his own consideration which is of Russian writer, Gogol. Here, the newly born child's identity is determined through his birth, as an Indian, as a Bengali Ganguli. So identities are prearranged, they are transferred from parents to children. Children are nurtured in those identities from childhood onwards without their cognizance. Thus, birth decides social, cultural and biological identities then the society recognizes descendants by given name and validates through the status and aroma developed by ancestors.

The parents always uphold connections with their home country and attempt to indoctrinate the importance of values of their country in their children. But the children are unaware of their roots sometimes and they are captivated more by their peer groups and the society at host country as they feel it no longer as host country for them, but as their birth place. At times the host country also does not consent them completely and they contest for cultural identity. After moving to foreign countries, some Indians change their names according to host country's cultural synchronization. The same happens with Gogol Ganguli. The author refutes the expression by saying "What's in a name?" as title of the novel 'The Namesake' goes with thoughtful confutations, by not taking name as serious identity disclosure. The author is preoccupied with notions of name, because, name reveals the identity of a person. The name of a person connotes the ethnicity of individuals. Even the traditional pet names annoy people in foreign land as they reveal roots of the name and put them under amorphousness.

The thematic perception of name and identity is still discussed in third chapter also. Gogol starts kindergarten and his parents propose another name 'Nikhil' at school and 'Gogol at home. But Gogol does not understand his new name and why he has to be called by name Nikhil. He is completely troubled to be Nikhil, someone he doesn't know till then and at the same time other people also do not know him with new name, Nikhil. He does not want others to remember him with old name and no one should ask him the reasons. The novelist puts herself in the shoes of Gogol in relation to preserving pet names. Jhumpa Lahiri's birth name is Nilanjana Sudeshna, she is used to have a pet name, Jhumpa which is initiated by her teacher to pronounce easily and that has become her formal name. She felt uncomfortable at many times whenever she is called with the name Jhumpa. She tried so much to make herself an American but she is half-fulfilled in that aspect. The same sensitivity she positions in Gogol who is never keen on called by this name. The anguish experienced by Gogol is the distress of Jhumpa Lahiri. Lahiri's parents who are first generation Diaspora are always secluded from mainstream American culture. In spite of speaking in English, they are let down by their accent. Lahiri has displayed all this through number of encounters in *The Namesake*. Tony Morrison in his novel *Tar Baby* explains a close similar situation like Gogol faced from the novel *Namesake*. The writer explains that:

“In eight years he’d had seven documented identities and before that a few undocumented ones. So he barely remembered his real original name himself. Actually the name most truly his wasn’t on any of the Social Security cards, union dues cards, discharge papers, and everybody who knew it or remembered it in connection with him could very well be dead Son. It was the name that called forth the true him. According to him that he never lied to, the one he tucked in at night and the one he did not want to die. The other selves were like the words he spoke - fabrications of the moment, misinformation required to protect Son, from harm and to secure that one reality at least.” (Morrison, 1991: Pg. 139)

As a child, Gogol is associated with his name; he is fascinated by that name. He feels that his name is unique and he wants to listen from his father the reason to keep his name as Gogol but Ashoke does not reveal it thinking that Gogol cannot understand the reasons at his age. Gogol is not bothered of his name until he is eleven. But when he turns fourteen, Gogol starts despising his name and he even feels aggrieved being asked about it. At the college party, Gogol is disinclined to introduce himself to Kim with name ‘Gogol’; instead he says his name is Nikhil which gives him the confidence to kiss her. Gogol bewilders between two names. Though, he dislikes his old name, he feels that his name does not give any imperative meaning to be acclaimed. His new name gives him confidence and comfort. It isn’t Gogol who kissed Kim but Nikhil. He likes to adhesive to new name. The whole shift of identity moves from Gogol to Nikhil. Thus, identity is not a constant conundrum which bothers people in another country to stick to one particular identity. Gogol’s social and cultural identity does not change by changing a name but he feels unrest individually with previous name. But for Ashoke, Gogol implies a beginning and a survival. The name fills him with joy as he chooses his favorite writer’s name and it specifies a new life. But the same name, the first identity of their son becomes the issue to add to the problem of identity crisis in Gogol’s self-acceptance. After knowing the reason to name him as Gogol, he starts discarding dual identity. He does not appreciate the emotional significance of the name. He does not like to be known by a name which is neither Indian, nor American, nor even his first name. When he comes to know about his namesake, the Russian Author, he becomes desperate to get rid of his name. He does not feel like an American with this name. His name Gogol “sounds ludicrous to his ears, lacking dignity of gravity.” (76) He does not want to read Nikolai Gogol as he thinks it “would mean paying tribute to his namesake, accepting it somehow” (92). Gogol reminds us Stuart Hall’s explanation that “Identity as a production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation.” (Hall: 10)

The question of identity is a postcolonial discourse; the question of identity plays a vital role especially in literature and even socially in practicality. He changes his name, though; he and others are acquainted with old name, “he does not feel like Nikhil” (105). Yet, he dislikes everything that reminds him of his past and tradition. Leaving behind, his old name is not so easy to forget by other and him as well. When, Gogol wants to change his name completely through procedures, his father agrees to it and says everything is possible in America but when he visits home in weekends, his old name returns to him. “Nikhil evaporates and Gogol claims him again.” (106). He tries to put a line between his past and his present, but at times the past comes to his present with the name Gogol and tries to make him bewildered. Gogol wishes to live as American. He desires to live unobserved by anyone who knows his past and new people in his present life not to meet his old friends and relatives. The problem clings again and again when he is not identified as an American by other Americans, though he is born and brought up there. His identity is challenged by situations. The adoption of ‘Nikhil’ gives him immense pleasure and confidence to continue with his life but the name Gogol follows as shadow and coheres to him that he signs his old name unconsciously. He tries to kill his old identity quicker. Ashoke feels new life when Gogol is born but Gogol feels his new life with changing name. At one side, Americans separate him from their culture, the other side, he considers himself an American. American society says, “But you’re Indian” (157). Gogol is left in between, as an outsider in American society and dissenter of Indianness. So, ‘who he is’ becomes the main issue of identity. What determines identity? Is it the name, which can be the very first factor in the formation? Name is an identification given to individuals but the actual

identity is prearranged to individuals through birth. All possible existing identities apply to individuals accordingly. Though, one is not particular about to glue to the identities, they definitely decide one's life without agreements. These are called social, cultural, economic and biological identities. The later identities which come in to one's life are floating spectrums. Finally in the novel *The Namesake*, the death of his father procures great change in him. He learns that he cannot abandon or disregard the importance of either culture but must learn to merge the two together. He realizes that his identity is overstated by both cultures. He does not have to be one or the other; he does not have to choose. He is made up of both and it should strengthen his pride instead of weakening it. He feels no shame. He has assimilated himself in American culture and values, at the same time retaining his parents' Indian culture and now proud of his name 'Nikhil Gogol Ganguli' and all it means. So he starts a journey 'to rediscover his roots, his self, and his hyphenated identity and to revitalize the alternate culture'. He actively participates in the formation of his new and ever-widening identification. Thus, it is not the name only which determines identity. Identity is not just 'who I am'. It's not all about certain sex, race, age, job and family. These words just provide a framework within which one exists. Identity is not stable and unitary rather it is multiple and ever-widening. It is the past only, with which present exists and prepares a way to the future.

Another aspect which determines identity and distinguishes Ashoke as the 'Other' is language. The language has become a barrier for the couple when they come to hospital at the time of their child, Gogol's delivery. After her admission into hospital, once Ashima expects her husband to come in but he has to stay outside the curtain around her bed. He utters in hurry, 'I'll be back', in Bengali, a language none of the nurses nor doctor speaks and understands. The purpose of physical curtain symbolizes as a line which separates them from Americans by speaking in Bengali in the United States. Language has developed identity of its own, when human beings use language for communication, it brings histories of people along with it. Though, language is a structure in social mobility, it differentiates two cultures, two places, two nations or communities and finally differentiates two individuals.

"Just as, at the level of relations between groups, a language is worth what those who speak it are worth, so too, at the level of interactions between individuals, speech always owes a major part of its value to the value of the person who utters it." (Bourdieu, 1977: Pg. 652)

Under the influence of colonization, English has become world's prominent language. The ratio of English speaking people and new learners are increasing day by day. It has become the lingua franca of the world. As people move to England and America for better opportunities in studies and jobs, the necessity of learning English has significance in social life. So, when Ashoke moves to America along with his wife for better employment opportunities, English becomes the necessary language for his survival. Yes, of course, when Ashoke says something in Bengali to a nurse, she is not offend or frenzied but replies politely, "Don't you worry, Ganguli, she's got long ways to go, we take over from here." So there is no serious threat put to their identity but speaking a language which others cannot understand may cause surprise to other listeners. Here, the identity is very personal built by two nation languages yet the identity can be overlooked by learning English language or learning another language changes the identity of the couple. A constructive notion of certain identities can be erased through accommodating the language. Thus, identity is:

"The novel, *The Namesake* is about this perpetual dilemma faced by immigrants as they struggle to maintain their identities while trying to shake them off at the same time. The first generation's story was about adaptation and learning accommodating and also discovering new things about themselves. The second generation finds itself presented with two conflicting realities and cultures and sets of expectations - one of the host countries through the socio-cultural surroundings and the other of the home country through their parents." (Batra, 50)

1.3 The question of Identity in the novel *The Lowland*

The Lowland is a mournful fiction described with subtle ease and it pushes the reader to feel sorry and pity in observation of the characters as the story moves forward. This novel is impeccable in narration which alters the reader every point of time. The novel depicts the encounters of life by individuals which

largely affects other individual characters. Consequence becomes the destiny of characters. The novel with a nall-encompassing, fascinating plot, peels naked identities of brother, lover, father, and mother, over and over again with simple signs. The novel divulges the real attitude of characters towards other characters in difficult situations. The novel starts with description of two physical small ponds in the backyard which reminds us two brothers having certain similar qualities in certain aspects yet conflicting attitudes make them separate from one another. They have different thinking aptitudes right from childhood, during the playing time, choosing different subjects in academics, picking different colleges to study and finally opting for different approaches in life. They are altogether two poles apart, Subhash being the elder determines his life with showing respect to parents, studying hard to get scholarship in America and moving to foreign land to fulfill his dreams away from messy circumstances in Tollygunge. On the other hand, Udayan is the younger, impetuous in actions and generous to people around him. He turns towards Naxalbari movement thinking as the option for equality in the society, marries a girl without his parents' consent. The identity both brothers form or shape is quite stimulating, both have clear attention in what they do, choose as the carrier but one questions the other with thoughtful insights.

Udayan asked 'How can you walk away from what's happening? There, of all places?'

Subhash replied, 'It's a degree program. It's only a matter of a few years'.

You don't think what you are doing is selfish?

This isn't a game you're playing. What if the police come to the house? What if you get arrested?

What would Ma and Baba think?

There's more to life than what they think.

What's happened to you, Udayan? They're the people who raised you. Who continue to feed and clothe you. You'd amount to nothing, if it weren't for them." (The Lowland, 2013: Pg. 28-29)

These lines clearly demarcate each other attitude towards life. Both of them are fixing goals in their lives, moulding carriers in their perception towards life. They are in search of their identities. Udayan is intense to opt for movement, work for poor and needy; aiming for better society, though, the path he chooses against Indian state. Whereas, Subhash intensifies his goal of going abroad for studies and job as intelligent and acceptable to parents in his thoughts and deeds. The identities they want to live with are welcomed as righteous from their perception but objectionable to each other. One cannot think of other's identity as a correct one, and cannot imagine stepping into other's shoes. The conception of identity formed and developed in present day are never unified, but, rather on the contrary, more and more fragmented. Stuart Hall adds that: Identities are never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting an antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions." (Stuart Hall, 2010: Pg.4)

Udayan's revelation of life and reality is born once again in the new ideology of the Naxalbari movement so much that he believed it completely. Though, his father once said, "I've already lived through change in this country, I know what it takes for one system to replace another. Not you." (23-4) The formation of ideology shapes the identities in such way, often appears the entire life in that challenge. Udayan's choice of ideology makes the sense of worthy and serene in his perception, though; Subhash warns him it as against law and his father's caution it as not his duty. But Udayan fixed it to life with all circumstances. He even marries a girl of his choice without parents' concern. He is firm in his ideas and moreover, he tries to convince Subhash that his choice is a better example and an opportunity to work for his own people. At times, both personal and social conditions of one's identity causes the influence and momentous on others, parents, siblings, relatives and neighbors which can be observed in the case of Udayan. His decision to marry Gauri, his college mate, to join hands with Naxalbari movement affected the rest of the family after his death. Identity construction and ideology enunciation always persist as an unfinished, on-going, advance on social and on personal level. The trainings of identity and ideology program focus the significance of certain specific associations and social establishments in this development.

"However; most perspectives acknowledge that social identities and ideologies tend to be interconnected in the everyday life. Although the utilitarian tradition of research identifies self-

interest as a more significant predictor of individual and social behaviour than identity or ideology a number of recent studies point out that both ideology and identity have a significant impact on social and individual action." (Bailey and Gayle, 2003: Pg.)

Udayan's ideology is to work in Naxalbari movement but unfortunately he is shot dead. Gauri, her wife is ready to bear a child of Udayan. Fate has decided Udayan to vanish from the world leaving Gauri and to be born child abandoned. Gauri's life is now in problem of relational identity. Till the death of Udayan, she is wife Udayan but now her life and future put to question. She has married without Udayan parents' approval, now after the death of Udayan; she is not allowed to his home. Subhash observes his mother's deliberate aloofness toward Gauri, threatened by his father's unresponsiveness is intended to drive her away from the house. In thought of Gauri and expected child in difficult and abandoned situations, all he could do is to help Gauri from the mercilessness of his parents and the frequent police inquiries. He decides to take her away legally by marrying her: "To take his brother's place, to raise his child, to come to love Gauri as Udayan had." (115). Subhash tries to persuade her with the options remaining at their presence: "that in America no one knew about the movement, no one would bother her. She could go on with her studies. It would be an opportunity to begin again." (119) in contemplation to what Subhash advised her, Gauri agrees to accompany Subhash to Rhode Island, not out of love for him, but the decision offers an alternative for change and academic prospects which she desired for. Now the identity of Gauri changes again by marrying Subhash. Though, her social status remains same with Udayan's family but now she is wife of Subhash. Gauri's identity as wife, mother to a child, Bela and her present living nation identity change after marrying Subhash. Now, Gauri's identity is double described. She is linked to Udayan even after his death through his child and she is also Subhash's wife. Though, she is unwilling to accept Subhash as his husband but in return, Subhash looks after her every need. He also embraces Bela, daughter of late Udayan. He cares for her and he does all possible procedures to raise her as his daughter.

Bela, after finishing her studies, she starts working. "She has taught low-income families to grow vegetables in their backyards, so that they wouldn't have to depend entirely on food banks." (224) Subhash felt a little susceptible, convinced that Udayan's influence is greater and at times he believed "Udayan would come back, claiming his place, claiming Bela from the grave as his own." (225) but Gauri, accepted Subhash as her husband for social identity and she even does not care for Bela, her child. She leaves her responsibilities on Subhash to raise Bela. Bela believes completely Subhash as her father but she is disappointed with her mother's attitude towards Subhash and herself. Many a times, Bela is saddened by the attitude of her mother. She develops a kind of animosity towards Gauri. It is a bit melodramatic from Gauri's point of view; her role has been changing right from the beginning, from wife of Udayan to widow, from sister-in-law of Subhash to his wife, from mother to childless woman. She agreed to marry Subhash to get shelter for her and her child, to get identity of someone's wife in society and finally to get better future in her carrier too. But, she abandoned Bela. She has shaped alternate meaning for her life, but she has overlooked that these adaptations put her identity at stake. She feels that "layering her life only to strip it bare, only to be alone in the end." (240) James D. Fearon in his book, "*What is Identity (as we now use the word)*" elucidates that:

"Personal identity is a set of attributes, beliefs, desires, or principles of action that a person thinks distinguish her in socially relevant ways and that (a) the person takes a special pride in; (b) the person takes no special pride in, but which so orient her behavior that she would be at a loss about how to act and what to do without them; or (c) the person feels she could not change even if she wanted to. Most often, I will argue, the (a) meaning applies, so that for usage in ordinary language personal identity can typically be glossed as the aspects or attributes of a person that form the basis for his or her dignity or self-respect." (D. Fearon, 1999: Pg. 11)

Gauri, after losing Udayan due to his sudden death, she feels abrupt loneliness. Her life becomes unreciprocated. She has fixed her life to obstinacy, married Subhash to endure her life and to be born child as well. She does not take any pride; she is at loss how to react or what to do in absence of her husband Udayan. She runs all her life in loss of self and procured a mind to engage in something and that something has

become, developing her carrier, but not attention of Subhash and Bela. In a way, she has slowly developed her identity in obtaining a job, but, at the same time she lost identity as wife and a mother. That is the reason; she sensed that the silence of Bela and her absence is a befitting punishment for her wrong doing. Though, she has understood what it meant to walk away from her own child, but, not in opposition to control things then.

When Bela knows the factual facts in her family, initially, she could not receive the facts and felt a bit of stress it propelled through her body. But as time passed, she calmed her mind and reassured to call Subhash. She expressed gratitude for telling her about Udayan and said the information helped her to clear certain things. After her daughter, Magna is born; she expressed Subhash that telling her about the import of the sacrifice he had done for her sake made her to love him more. Finally, when her mother has visited her on the way to London for conference, she unconfined by saying, "How dare you set foot in this house, go back to whatever it was that was more important, I can't stand the sight of you. Nothing will excuse what you did. You're not my mother. You're nothing. You are dead to me as he [Udayan] is. The only difference is that you left me by choice." (312-13). Bela out of rage, abandons her parents' identity, especially, her mother's identity most. She feels that she abandoned forever by them, father by death and mother by choice. At present, she is confined to her daughter's responsibilities and she has immense gratitude on Subhash for accepting her as daughter and for bringing her up in fruitful manner. Now, the choice of life is at her hands, to take decisions in accepting identities and rejecting relational identities.

Charles Taylor in his book, *The Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* explains that:

"My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose." (Taylor, 1989: Pg. 27)

Thus, in Taylor's analysis, personal identity is a personal moral ideologies, conclusions and objectives that an individual applies as a normative agenda to lead to an action in life. Udayan with his curiosity opted for Naxalbari movement and for love marriage. He develops his own identity through ideology, through movement and his will to serve poor and needy. But, ultimately, his ideology, his identity leads him to death. Subhash, his sibling, out of mourning for her brother's death, knowing Gauri's pregnancy and the rejection of Gauri by his parents takes a decision to marry her just to create a space for her ambitions' fulfillment. His life passes in remaining as a guardian to Gauri and rearing Bela as his child. Gauri first loves and marries Udayan, becomes abandoned after his death, remarries Subhash, moves to America, bears a child but keeps herself away from Subhash and her daughter Bela. And finally, Bela of her own free will isolates her and her daughter from Gauri and her past life. Bela feels that: "Bela felt the urge to strike her. To be rid of her, to kill her all over again." (314) at the end of meeting with her mother, Bela is glad that the confrontation happened by her not her father, Subhash. She is gratified with Subhash's conduct; she thinks that who will devote much of his life sharing with the fallout from his sibling's heedless actions? Though, Gauri is irresponsible, self-centered woman, who will repay Subhash's bounteousness, compassion and his struggles to design a new life for them in America, even after Gauri is disregarded him. Humans can only reside in the twilight or the sunrise, never both. So, individuals can enjoy and dwell in happiness or tough situations one at a time not both together. The novel reveals the ideologies, individual attitudes towards life and people and thereby, constructing identities in life.

1.4 The concept of Alienation

Though, the concept of alienation is quite closer to the concept of identity in its explanation of individual self and social relation of one's existence. In English dictionary, there are other words like separation, isolation, division which are related or closer to the meaning of alienation. The notion of alienation happens with restrictive and sometimes domineering role society often plays in relation to individuals and certain groups, but it ensues mostly with individuals. A dictionary of literary terms defined as: "Alienation is the state of being alienated or estranged from something or somebody; it is a condition of the mind." Britannica Encyclopedia defines alienation as "the state of feeling estranged or separated from ones milieu, work and products of work or self." Thus, alienation is an elemental in understanding why an individual or

group is alienated? Why do people alienate others in society in relation to dominance? The concept examines basically the split existence of humanity, of man's alienation in an antagonistic life and the certainty of death in a world where it happens through the destruction of war. It deals with narrations, ideas of human beings isolation through compulsion by the society or by individuals' choice in expressing distress against society. Alienation is the frustration of ordinary people from the process of decision making. Alienation is the emotion of anguish and hopelessness when they are not in a position to determine their purposes on their own which in fuses them to react accordingly, either by rebelling or isolating themselves from society. Alienation affects the progress of the charisma of man and reasons accountable for alienation are focus to the impact of social-conditions on human survival. Eric Fromm writes in his book *Sane Society* that: "the meaning of alienation is that process of feeling in which anyone feels alienation from self"(Eric Fromm, 1956: Pg. 10)

The alienation happens in society in everyday life, but, many people are not aware of the concept as such and take decisions as a form of agitation. Society, its dominant values, traditions and rules push some people towards alienation. Supposing, Indian caste system separated people based on 'superior' and 'inferior' notions, expelled some people out of the society and decided certain value statements for them to be followed. Taviss in her book "*Changes in the Form of Alienation*" elucidates that:

"Alienation is the sense of estrangement brought out by the sudden discovery that the social system is either oppressive or incomplete with their desires and ideas. 'Self-alienation', however, means the loss of contact of the individual selves with any inclinations or desires that are not in agreement with the prevailing social patterns, as a result of which the individuals are forced to manipulate in accordance with the social demands or feel incapable of controlling their actions"(Taviss, 1969: Pg. 19)

Thus, alienation refers to a relationship between subjects, or group of individuals, some aspects of governmental policies and natural consequences which affects some individuals directly and some individuals indirectly. As this paper limits its thematic analyzation to Jhumpa Lahiri's novels, the analysis is confined to two novels '*The Namesake*' and '*The Lowland*'.

1.5 The theme of alienation in the Novel '*The Namesake*'

The theme of alienation, Ashima's often contemplation away from Calcutta and her parents and the dilemma being a stranger in a foreign land become the noticeable thought throughout the novel. When Gogol is born, Ashima bemoans for the reason that her close family is not around them to take care the child or to name the newly born child. She feels that in the absence of their family in needy time, the birth has less significance in America and the birth's meaning is only half justifiable. After arriving home from hospital, Ashima declares in resentment that, "I don't want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It's not right. I want to go back." During the time of child's discharge from the hospital, the staff enquires the couple whether any name is given to child. But the answer is no since her parents are away from them. Ashima's grandmother has to select the name and moreover, the letter with suggested name reaches America only in a month. It is a compulsory rule in America to discharge a baby with birth certificate and the certificate should have name. But, the couple is not ready with the name. So, this entire episode creates a bit tension and annoyance in them and more in Ashima. They feel alienated in different culture and tradition. First, they feel alienated for being away from their home, motherland and secondly, alienation from American culture. When her family moved to suburbs, she feels alienated once again from her homeland. This alienation is compared to 'a sort of lifelong pregnancy', because there she is literally in a continuous wait, an endless encumbrance, a constant feeling out of world. Gogol also feels alienated in relation to his name, particularly when he comprehends that no one in Russia, India, and America or anywhere in the world takes his name. And the most pity part is that, there is no clear basis and clarification for his name at least for namesake. So, he feels as if he is isolated from the world in this way. In relation to keeping his name undisclosed, Gogol prepares a resolution to alienate himself from his parents by spending all his time with Maxine. He feels that Maxine and her friends should not know his past with Gogol name.

Sidney Finkelstein defines in his book *Existentialism and Alienation in American Literature* alienation as:

“A psychological phenomenon, an internal conflict, a hostility felt towards something seemingly outside oneself which is linked to oneself, a barrier erected which is actually no defense but an impoverishment of oneself.” (Finkelstein, 1965: Pg. 7)

Ashima feels isolation when she lives alone in the house on Pemberton Road and she literally feels her husband's demise as ever existing forfeiture. She hates persistent darkness in the house and in her soul as well, she is obsessed with secluded house, sleeping on bed and waking up alone put her at serious alienation from family and self.

The theme of alienation recurs in Moushumi's life too. She reveals to Gogol how she rejected all the Indian bridegrooms with whom her parents attempted to match her. After her broke up engagement with fiancé, she feels that she has convinced in her mind willfully that there would be no one at all thereafter. At times, she ponders that it is her miscalculation to marry someone, with whom she does not have love and that instigated her, intuitively, to close herself from relations. Sartre describes existentialistic alienation in his book, *Being and Nothingness* as:

“In the shock that seizes me when apprehend the other's look, I experience a subtle alienation of all my possibilities, which are not associated with the objects of the world far from me in the midst of world.”(Sartre, 1963: Pg. 18)

Ashima senses complete alienation and aloofness after throwing a party. She feels suddenly lonely, everlastingly unaccompanied and “she turns away from the mirror and sobs for her husband.” She feels “both impatience and indifference for all the days she still must live.” She does not feel interest to live in Calcutta with the family she left over thirty years before, nor does she feel excited about being in the United States with her children. She just feels exhausted and separated from her husband forever.

1.6 The theme of alienation in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel 'The lowland'

The Lowland is formulated about the impression of alienation. Udayan feels a kind of separation from his brother, Subhash, when he fled to America for his further studies. Though, they have separate ideas and ambitions in life, elder choosing to go abroad for studies, younger to endure in Naxalbari movement, both the brothers have affection on one another. Each feels comfort and friendliness in other's presence. It is when Subhash goes away in his own decision, Udayan feels lonely and he promulgates in his letter to Subhash:

“The days are dull without you. And though I refuse to forgive you for not supporting a movement that will only improve the lives of millions of people, I hope you can forgive me for giving you a hard time. Will you hurry up with whatever it is you're doing? An embrace from your brother.” (Jhumpa Lahiri, 2013: Pg. 38)

Udayan is a misfit in the ideas of his parents and brother Subhash to study well and to get good job. But, he opts for his will to endeavor in movement. He thinks that society is largely in the imperfection, at the hands of evils. So he stays in lowland, marries a girl, Gauri against his parents' will. At times, he feels lonely from his brother, so, he writes letters to his brother and expresses his affection to him.

Other character that gradually pushed towards complete alienation by people and circumstances is Gauri, a wife of Udayan. She elopes with Udayan against both sides parents. She becomes unaccompanied and solitary after her husband's death. Now, she is left with no one, her life is put to question mark, endless seclusion. Udayan's death puts questions to her survival and her child to be born. Her in-laws rejected her entry in to the house. She is left with no options at all. She is completely alienated now from her family; her in-law's family and separated for life from Udayan. But, Subhash solicits her and takes her with him to Rhode land. But she does not conduct herself as proper wife to Subhash, she makes it opportunity to give a birth to Bela and then to take care her studies. She feels so many times as secluded and expresses her rage for alienation. She says:

“She felt as if she contained a ghost, as Udayan was. The child was a version of him, in that it was both present and absent, both within her and remote. She regarded it with a sort of disbelief,

just as she still did not really believe that Udayan was gone, missing now not only from Calcutta but from every other part of the earth she'd just flown across." (Lahiri, 2013: Pg. 124)

The other characters which feel alienation are Udayan's parents. After, Udayan's death, Subhash moves again to America along with Gauri, their daughter-in-law. Now, they are left with no one at their house. After some days, Subhash's father dies. His mother is left with no one in the house. She is entirely abandoned by circumstances. Before the death of Subhash's father, he wanted to sell his house and move away from Calcutta, but they could not do that, they reminisce all the past happened at their sight, right from their marriage, birth of two children, memories of their studies, Udayan's marriage and Udayan's death as debacle. He feels the house and their staying in the house without any children is hopeless. He feels:

"The house stood practically empty. A mockery of the future they'd assumed would unfold." (128)

"The next morning, a few minutes later, after Deepa entered the room, Bijoli heard the cup and saucer break into pieces against the floor. Before Deepa came to find her on the terrace, to tell her he'd died in his sleep, Bijoli already knew. She became a widow, as Gauri had become. Bijoli now wears white saris, without a pattern or a border. She's removed her bangles, and stopped eating fish. Vermillion no longer marks the parting of her hair." (129)

"Bijoli's home feels just as forsaken, its course just as diverted. Udayan has not lived to inherit it, and Subhash refuses to come back. He should have been a comfort; the one son remaining when the other was taken away. But she was unable to love one without the other. He had only added to the loss." (131)

All the above extracts from the novel elucidates the emptiness, the endless sorrow, never returned children, not negotiable past, not amendable agreements with Subhash and Gauri, the conditions place them at the conduit of alienation. Even after her husband's death, Bijoli spends time doing her daily duties, dwelling in the memories of Udayan and Subhash. Nonetheless, the occupied rooms with cloudy darks, the utmost grief in her bones and the loneliness in the soul embroil her to maximum isolation and force her to highest desolation. During the time of her unexpected death, she is hospitalized alone; no one there to console her and finally, leaves her breath at deprived stage, not giving chance to Subhash to be with her at the last moment of her life. It is a pathetic but inevitable.

"Bijoli did not die in Tollygunge, in the house to which she'd clung. And though Subhash had returned to be close to her, from so far, he'd arrived, that final morning at the hospital, too late. She'd died on her own, in a room with strangers, denying him the opportunity to watch her pass." (*The Lowland*: 156)

If a person being alone, devoid of people and hope on future is termed as 'Alienation' then, that can be observed as crisis of personal identity in which there is tension between the inner mind and world's outward realities. The isolation of Bijoli and her husband from children is caused by the death of Udayan and Subhash's departure to foreign land. Individuals are clubbed together in a family as parents, children, daughters-in-law and their children. The identities of each individual are formed through these family relations. The social, cultural and economic identities are prearranged in societies and by the birth to specific families, identities run the life of an individual accordingly. The identities are shared or transferred by the parents to children, from children to their wives and to their children again. Grusec J. E, Goodnow J. J, and Kuczynski L. say in an article, "*New analyses of parenting contributions to children's acquisition of values*" that:

"Societies have a number of channels through which they transmit their values. In psychological research, however, parents are considered as central agents in passing on their own and their society's values to their children." (Grusec J. E, Goodnow J. J, and Kuczynski L, 2000: 207)

So, identities are transmitted hereditarily. But, there is possibility of shaping new identities by individuals of a family with their thoughts and ideology behaviors accordingly. Now, if an individual of a family dies with in any natural or unnatural reasons, then those identities are diffused to other family members in their interest. At the same time, the death can affect the people of family in many ways, for the reason that, the identities are connected to one another in the family. So, the sudden demise of a member in family directly or indirectly can

disturb or facilitate the rest of the life. In overall sense, the very core of personal existence or identity put to disruption of life. In this process, individuals are pushed towards alienation from society, family or from individuals. Cornel West in his article, "A Matter of Life and Death" describes that:

"How you construct your identity is predicated on how you construct desire and how you conceive of death: desire for recognition; quest for visibility; the sense of being acknowledged; a deep desire for association. It's the longing to belong, a deep, visceral need that most linguistically conscious animals who transact with an environment participate in. And then there is a profound desire for protection, for security, for safety, for surety for 'true' self and the demands of modern organizational life. And so in talking about identity we have to begin to look at the various ways in which human beings have constructed their desire for recognition, association, and protection over time and in space and always under circumstances not of their own choosing. But identity also has to do with death. We can't talk about identity without talking about death." (Cornel West, 1992: 2)

The death of Udayan in the novel 'The Namesake' has disturbed the family, the personal identities are shifted to other members of the family and some individuals are forced to isolation and alienation of self. So the identities and alienation are question and answer of how life and death derail or organize based on natural conditions, individual behaviors, social hierarchies and phenomenal ideologies with good or bad makings.

1.7 Conclusion

The question of identity is everywhere in the world, but, the identity has pragmatic meanings, it could be personal identity, family or group identity. So, there could be lots of interpretations on the concept of identity, variety if distinguished identities with explanations. The question of identity and alienation is intermingled in some scenarios. Identity is something formed based on ideologies or individual thoughts but they are in relation to society, other individuals. Identity is not a single isolated entity to describe, because, every human being is part with the other in so many ways and do survive in a group. In the absence of society, a personal identity need not be described. Personal identities are drawn from societies and society is shaped with individual identities. In this process, when individuals are pushed to isolation or individuals keep them isolated, feeling a thought that there are any more connected to society or individuals of society then, it could be called as alienation from the society or individuals. The birth of individual disposes the identities in prearranged society. So, people are born in identities and live with identities and die with identities or die for identities. Sometimes, the death of an individual decides or transmits others' identities. So, the deaths of individuals alienate people from families or society and identities are put to problems, questioned or reshaped.

In the novel, 'The Lowland', the death Udayan disturbed other lives of the family and their identities are transmitted or reasoned to alienation. Gauri as Udayan's wife has one kind of identity in her marriage life but when Udayan dies, her individuality is confused, and the identity got by Udayan is vanished. When she remarries Udayan's brother, Subhash, her identity is negotiated in another form. Even another novel, 'The Namesake' also reveals the same crisis of identity question and leads to alienation of other characters during the time of central individual death. Ashima also feels the same question of identity and alienation when her husband dies and her son lives in some other place. So, the life and death decides people's identities and sometimes make them alienated from individuals and society.

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